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JCS FOR THE VICE CHAIRMAN, ADM GIAMBASTIANI

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR THE VISIT OF THE VICE CHAIRMAN OF
THE JOINT CHIEFS, ADM GIAMBASTIANI

Classified By: Charge Alexander A. Arvizu. Reason 1.4 (a and d)

11. (C) Summary. Admiral Giambastianini, your trip to Bangkok will take place as Thailand recovers from its most serious political upheaval in over a decade. We are asking all U.S. visitors meeting with Thai officials to encourage continued respect for the democratic process. Your visit is also a superb opportunity to review key security programs with Senior Thai Military officials. Thailand affords the United States a unique platform in Asia. Our largest exercise, Cobra Gold, will be underway during your visit. Cobra Gold is America's only annual joint/combined multilateral training exercise in the Asia Pacific Region and now includes the active participation of Japan, Singapore and Indonesia. Thailand is an ally in the War on Terror. Thai troops deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq and we are working closely with the Thai to make them better able to address separatist elements in the Muslim majority South. We are also working with U.S. Embassies in the region to better address counter terrorism throughout SE Asia. Our IMET program is a major success -- senior leaders in all the services are graduates. In fact, your host, Royal Thai Supreme Command Chief of Staff GEN Lertrat Ratanavanich, was an honors graduate from the U.S. Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth. You met GEN Lertrat in mid-March. END SUMMARY.

THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

12. (C) Bilateral relations with Thailand are very good. The goodwill generated by America's quick and massive response to the December 26 2004 tsunami was palpable. Thailand is a Treaty Ally and has been firmly supportive of the International War on Terror and has participated in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). American businesses have over \$20 billion in direct investment in Thailand. The United States is Thailand's largest export market and its second-largest foreign investor.

13. (C) Nonetheless, there are points of friction. Human rights remains a key concern. On October 25, 2004, poorly trained Thai military and civilian security forces forced nearly 1,300 Thai Muslim protesters into trucks to be transported to a military base nearly three hours away. 78 protesters died en route. Our protests over Thai Police involvement in approximately 1,300 extrajudicial killings during the 2003 Thai "war on drugs," rankles the Thai Government. Likewise, Thailand's policy of "constructive engagement" with the military junta in Burma and provision of economic assistance to Rangoon is a source of continuing frustration for us. The Thai government supports democracy in Burma but maintains, not altogether convincingly, that engagement with the SPDC is the only realistic approach it has to make progress on the major cross-border flows of refugees, illegal economic migrants, and methamphetamines it faces from Burma.

THE OVERALL SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

14. (C) The U.S.-Thai security relationship is based on over 50 years of close cooperation. Thai soldiers, sailors and airmen participated in the Korean and Vietnamese Conflicts and Thai peacekeepers served in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thailand is the fourth largest participant in the U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. Thailand's willingness to allow the United States to use U-tapao Naval Air Station as the hub for our regional tsunami assistance program was key to making Operation Unified Assistance a success. In fact, PACOM recently designated U-tapao as the most important Cooperative Security Location (CSL) in the Asia Pacific Region. While we avoid using the term "CSL" with the Thai due to their sensitivities about bases, U-tapao remains vital to our interests in the region. In your meetings with Thai officials, you will want to note the overall strength of the relationship -- highlighting our history and underscoring the importance of our tsunami cooperation, exercise program, increased tempo of USN ship visits (most recently, the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group), and cooperation in the War on Terrorism.

THE POLITICAL SITUATION

15. (SBU) The Thai political system is presently working through its biggest crisis since 1992. After tens of thousands of Thais participated in peaceful rallies protesting government corruption and PM Thaksin Shinawatra's (Prime Minister TOCK-SIN) recent tax-free sale of Shin Corp to Singapore. Thaksin dissolved parliament and called snap elections. The opposition boycotted the poll, and called on the voters to abstain. Many small parties, dredged up by the government to run "opposition" candidates were disqualified for fraud and though Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) political party won a majority of votes nationwide on April 2, the massive number of protest abstentions tainted his "victory." Thaksin subsequently announced that he was relinquishing his duties as Prime Minister to his senior Deputy Prime Minister and has left for a vacation abroad.

16. (C) Thaksin intends to formally step down as Prime Minister following the convening of this Parliament. On April 25, however, the King made public statements highly critical of undemocratic aspects of the elections, and instructed the relevant judicial bodies to propose a solution to the impasse caused by the boycott of opposition parties and the large number of abstentions. The courts' recommendations are expected soon, and could include annulling the vote and scheduling new elections later this year. Despite being out of the PM's office, most observers expect that Thaksin will still be the "puppetmaster" directing his party from the background. The situation remains fluid.

COUNTERTERRORISM AND SOUTHERN THAILAND

17. (C) Until recently, Prime Minister Thaksin's biggest domestic challenge was the unsettled security situation in the far southern part of the country. Southern Thailand, in particular the southernmost Muslim majority provinces of Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat, has experienced episodic violence since it was incorporated into the Siamese Kingdom in 1902. However, since January 2004, we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the level of violence. Press reports indicate that over 1,000 persons have been killed either by militants or by security forces during this period. Local Muslim separatist militants have attacked symbols of Thai and Buddhist authority, civilians, and local citizens suspected of collaborating with the Government. There continue to be daily incidents of violence. In March 2005, Thaksin appointed a National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) headed by highly respected former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun to look for alternative solutions to the long-running insurgency.

18. (C) Southern separatists direct their anger at the government in Bangkok, not at the United States. Since a U.S. presence or perception of U.S. involvement in the South could redirect that anger towards us and link it to the international jihadist movement -- a link that is currently absent -- we ensure that any offers of assistance or training pass the "location and label" test. Put simply, we keep U.S. military personnel away from the far South and we make sure that we do not label any assistance or training as directly linked to the southern situation. Likewise, we work to avoid feeding rampant, outlandish speculation that we are somehow fomenting the violence in the South in order to justify building permanent bases -- a very sensitive issue in Thailand. We do not want to jeopardize our access to key military facilities in Thailand like Utapao Naval Air Station.

19. (C) Working closely with Washington, the Embassy has a three-pronged focus to improve our military cooperation in order to address the violence in the South:

- 1) Using our exercise and training program to improve the professional and operational skills of the Royal Thai Armed Forces, especially the Thai Army;
- 2) Help the Thai break down stovepipes between the Thai military, police forces, and civilian agencies;
- 3) Do everything we can to ensure the Thai respect international human rights norms as they counter the violence.

Key military programs assisting the Thai include:

--JCETs programs focused on enhancing general CT capabilities, counter-insurgency operations, civil affairs and psychological operations, and information warfare. Since FY04 over 2500 Thai soldiers from 50 different units have been trained in counter-insurgency by U.S. Special Forces.

--Building a National Training Facility (NTF). We have worked with the Thai for over a year to develop an NTF that can serve as a world-class training facility. Such a site could not only help hone CT skills and provide human rights training, but be a key tool to improve peace keeping skills for soldiers in the region under the Global Peace Operations

Initiative (GPOI). We have been cobbling funds together to make the NTF a center of excellence and could use more.

--PSYOPS. We presently support a U.S. Military Information Support Team (MIST) unit from Ft. Bragg attached to JUSMAGTHAI. This team will likely be augmented by an experienced Civil Affairs planner within the next month who will assist with campaign planning and product support to counter ideological support to terrorism.

At the same time, we are working with Thai and U.S. law enforcement agencies to improve the professionalization of various Thai police entities.

REGIONAL MARITIME SECURITY

¶10. (C) A key U.S. objective in the region is to improve Maritime Security. We are working closely with PACOM to encourage Thailand and others to support the Regional Maritime Security Initiative (RMSI). We recently proposed to the Royal Thai Supreme Command and the Royal Thai Navy the Andaman Sea Maritime Security Initiative. This project is a layered approach to assist the Thai military secure territorial waters while also providing coverage of the northern shipping lanes feeding into the Strait of Malacca. It would combine a High Frequency Radar capable of reaching Sumatra, with a constellation of overlapping x-band radars to provide radar coverage of the waters off the west coast of Thailand. The initiative would also improve the Royal Thai Navy's interdiction capabilities and has the potential to be linked to other facilities in the region.

PROLIFERATION SECURITY INITIATIVE

¶11. (C) Despite our efforts since 2003, the RTG has not yet formally endorsed the PSI Statement of Principles. Prime Minister Thaksin has told senior USG officials that another "Muslim" ASEAN nation (read Malaysia or Indonesia) should endorse PSI first or concurrently with Thailand, so as to avoid the appearance that Thailand is getting too far in front of its neighbors and because of concern over how endorsement might be perceived vis-a-vis the situation in the South. It might be useful to remind your Thai interlocutors that PSI is among the President's top non-proliferation priorities. In June, Poland will host the first Senior Level Political Meeting of the PSI, inviting all nations that have endorsed the PSI interdiction Principles. More than 70 countries have indicated their support for the PSI.

MILITARY COOPERATION

¶12. (C) Perhaps due to their lack of a colonial heritage, Thai leaders are far more willing to host multilateral exercises than are others countries in Asia. Unlike Japan, which only hosts annual bilateral exercises due to legal prohibitions over collective security, or Australia, which avoids multilateral exercises so as not to "dumb down" its own training opportunities, the Royal Thai Government supports multilateral exercises as a way to show regional leadership. So long as our concepts are properly sold to Thai military and political leaders, we should be able to continue to modify exercises to meet our regional security objectives -- including an ability to establish a near-continuous presence in the region.

¶13. (C) We conduct a wide range of major exercises and training programs with Thailand each year, including Cobra Gold. Cobra Gold 2006 will include almost 7,000 U.S. troops working together with Thai counterparts in field training exercises ranging from Military Operations in Urban Terrain and Air Assault Operations to Naval Special Forces protecting offshore natural gas platforms. The Command Post Exercise at Cobra Gold will include participation by U.S., Thai, Japanese, Singaporean and Indonesian forces and will focus on peace keeping operations. Cobra Gold in the coming years will be a centerpiece of our Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI), designed to train 15,000 regional peacekeepers by 2010. As mentioned, U-tapao, the Thai Navy Air Base used as the primary staging area for U.S. disaster relief efforts in the region following the December 2004 tsunami, has long been a critical support hub for U.S.

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aircraft transiting the region. Over 420 DOD aircraft use it each year. Our largest air exercise, Cope Tiger, involves Thailand, the United States and Singapore. We have also been working closely with PACFLT to give our major naval exercise, CARAT, a more regional flavor in the coming years.

THE ROLE OF CHINA AND INDIA IN THE REGION

¶14. (C) Southeast Asia continues to feel the rising influence of China and India. While emphasizing the vital role of the U.S. in the region -- and Thailand's desire to intensify U.S. engagement -- Thai leaders also focus on developing stronger relations with the two regional powers. Bangkok views both

countries as sources of unlimited consumer demand and hope to conclude Free Trade Agreements with both nations. It surprises many visitors from Washington to learn that the Thai military has a number of Chinese weapons systems in its arsenal. While Thai military links with the United States are deeper and far more apparent than Sino-Thai links, China's growing influence in Thailand and Southeast Asia is evident in business, the arts, the media and the military. The PLA Navy has close links with the RTN and recently conducted a major ship visit to Phuket. After jointly holding a limited naval exercise in the Andaman Sea last fall, Thailand and China are exploring conducting joint SAR exercises. The RTN has acquired several ships from China over the past decade. China is refurbishing tanks and air defense equipment provided to Thailand in the late 1980's. Thailand is also trying to negotiate a barter deal trading Chinese armored vehicles for Thai fruit. Mil-to-mil exchanges between China and Thailand have expanded in recent years as has the number of bilateral military VIP visits.

THAI MILITARY STRUCTURE

¶15. (C) The relative power and influence of the Royal Thai Army (RTA) dwarfs the other services. As such, the Royal Thai Army Commander traditionally wields more real power than the Supreme Commander. Thailand's armed forces, which had a history of interfering in the country's politics, have not done so since 1992 and appear to be fully reconciled to constitutional roles of defense and security. Their exposure to U.S. civil-military values through their extensive participation in IMET training deserves some credit for this transformation of their attitude towards democracy.

THE ROLE OF THE ARMY

¶16. (C) The Royal Thai Army (RTA) is a legacy force faced with serious modernization issues. Although 30 years have passed, the RTA is still primarily designed to defeat the large conventional threat that Vietnam represented in the mid-1980's. On paper, the RTA would seem to possess the capability to defeat a large conventional attack -- it seems to possess an impressive number of main battle tanks, TOW missiles, and helicopters. Digging deeper, however, one quickly discovers real equipment problems. 80 of Thailand's 100 M60A3 main battle tanks are inoperable, TOW missiles are past their useful life expectancy and, at any given time, only 30 of the RTA's 96 UH-1 helicopters are operational.

¶17. (C) Much of this decline in effectiveness is due to the budget constraints that were imposed from 1997-2001 after the Asian Financial Crisis. Since that time, budgets have increased slightly, but not to pre-1997 levels. Accordingly, the RTA must selectively choose how to modernize. Serious corruption in the procurement process is still widespread -- and acknowledged by many Thai officers. Consequently, the RTA relies on JUSMAGTHAI and the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system for many of their high-profile procurement programs.

¶18. (C) The RTA's transformation vision, unpublished and informal as it is, is to become lighter and more mobile with upgraded C4I systems that will make it more agile operationally. On the C4I front, much work remains. The RTA HQ and subordinate commands use commercial dial-up Internet services and email accounts, if they use email at all. However, they do have VTC capability and use it frequently.

¶19. (C) The RTG's CT effort in the South has been plagued by Thaksin repeatedly changing his policies and lead agencies. Shortly after taking power, Thaksin decided to dissolve the joint civilian-police-military Task Force which since the 1980s had successfully contained the separatist-related violence. The loss of that coordinating body increased the natural propensity of the Thai bureaucracy to stovepipe information and not cooperate operationally. The problems caused by this lack of coordination have been compounded by the constant shifting of both the civilian and military leadership responsible for the South. In addition, Thaksin has often set unrealistic deadlines for his deputies to "solve" the southern problem and has been inconsistent in his policy statements, creating a situation where the operational leadership has a weak mandate and lack of strategic focus. Now, he finally appears settled on Army CINC GEN Sonthi Boonyaratklin (who is a Muslim with a Special Forces Background) as his chief military representative. Sonthi recently assured the Ambassador that the Army was rebuilding its intelligence and political network in the South, which is a good sign. Nonetheless, there is little guarantee that the Government won't switch course again in response to an actual or perceived setback.

¶20. (C) While the RTA has a long history working with the U.S. Army, recently we have also been working with MARFORPAC and III MEF to improve links between the U.S Marine Corps and the RTA. In many ways, our Marines are perfect training partners for the RTA and field exercises in Thailand afford our Marines many opportunities they don't have elsewhere in Asia. We will host the USS Essex Amphibious Assault Ship

during Cobra Gold and are looking for other training opportunities in the coming months.

THE NAVAL RELATIONSHIP

¶21. (C) While our overall relationship with the Thai military is good, our links with the Royal Thai Navy (RTN) are not as strong as those with the Royal Thai Army or Air Force. The RTN is smaller than the other services and tends to be less willing to be open with U.S. counterparts. This has not been the case historically, and we are working to reverse the trend through potential projects like the Andaman Sea Maritime Security Initiative. We've also been working with PACFLT and Seventh Fleet to increase the tempo of U.S. Navy ship visits. The April 19-24 visit of the USS Abraham Lincoln Carrier Strike Group was well received by the RTN, received front page and prime time media coverage, and was a successful opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of the U.S.-Thai security relationship. Recently, the Chinese have improved their ties to the RTN as evidenced by the ship visit to Phuket mentioned above, a joint SAR exercise in the Andaman Sea, and sales to Thailand of Chinese equipment. Likewise, the RTN has been developing a closer relationship with the Indian Navy and has conducted some exercises with the Indians.

¶22. (C) In addition to supporting our annual Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) exercise with Thailand, JUSMAGTHAI has worked closely with RTN Special Warfare units to increase their capacity. USN SEALS have helped to provide their Thai counterparts with some impressive capabilities. For instance, Thai SEALS regularly conduct exercises aimed at protecting oil and gas platforms in the Gulf of Thailand. This NSW relationship was graphically demonstrated during the tsunami response when USN and RTN SEALS rapidly deployed to

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Phuket to assist in the recovery efforts. The Prime Minister was photographed in a recovery boat manned by the SEALS. Despite their improved professionalism, the Thai SEALS are not well-supported by senior RTN officials.

THE AIR FORCE RELATIONSHIP

¶23. (C) Our premier air force exercise with Thailand is Cope Tiger. Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) officials have disagreed with our suggestions to combine Cope Tiger with Cobra Gold -- and in fact have told us that they will not agree to move Cope Tiger and will plan to hold the exercise bilaterally with Singapore, or even invite a third country, if we insist on moving it. We are working closely with PACAF, MARFORPAC and PACFLT to develop a way to support the exercise.

¶24. (C) Although Utapao is an RTN facility, PACAF has been designated PACOM's executive agent in assessing what upgrades are needed there. Thai officers and U.S. officials in country agree that Utapao needs some safety enhancements in order to continue to be safe for us to use. In September, a PACAF assessment team visited Utapao to determine what systems need enhancement or upgrading, the Thai eagerly await the results of the PACAF assessment.

¶25. (C) Last year, Thailand announced its plans to replace aging F-5s in the RTAF fleet. Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Rice and the President all urged Thailand to either use its defense budget to perform mid-life upgrades (MLU) on its existing F-16s or to buy F-16 Block 52s. A vast majority of senior RTAF officers favor the F-16 over SU-30. However, Russian officials and Israeli contractors have reportedly offered inducements to senior RTAF officers to buy Russian and PM Thaksin has reportedly promised President Putin that he would look favorably on Sukhoi's bid. We are urging the Thai to proceed with the MLU purchase but not to procure any Russian planes for interoperability reasons, the impact such a move could have on technology releases in the future, and the effect such a procurement might have on Thailand's ability to eventually purchase the Joint Strike Fighter. It would be helpful for you to reinforce these points.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR VISIT

¶26. (U) We are grateful that you have agreed to come to Thailand and look forward to making your visit a success.

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